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## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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*Shakespeare's Theater.* By ASHLEY H. THORNDIKE. New York: Macmillan, 1916.

This is a worth-while book, careful in method, admirable in tone, positive, unusually clear, and in many respects unexpectedly comprehensive. Besides the chapters naturally to be looked for upon the theaters, there are others dealing with Shakespeare's London, the court drama, government regulation, the dramatic companies, the authors, actors and acting, and, perhaps freshest and most illuminating of all, the Elizabethan audience. The book is also well illustrated and provided with good bibliographies which include most recent publications, though in those on the stage no reference is made either to Miss Charlotte Porter's extended discussions in the *First Folio* Shakespeare nor to the several recent papers by Professor T. S. Graves. Space is lacking for any further notice of these subjects, and for anything but the most superficial discussion of the more important matters concerning the theaters and the methods of stage presentation.

The most striking characteristic of the book is Professor Thorndike's obvious desire to take all possible influences into account, and his method of explaining Elizabethan practice by reference both to its antecedents in the mediaeval period and its developments during the Restoration. His treatment of the theater offers little that is new. Admitting the probability of variation and of change, he tries to construct a typical theater rather than to arrive at a precise knowledge of any one. His plan of the Fortune (p. 75) is surely wrong in one particular: no practical stage manager would ever build a theater in which there was no easy means of passage, concealed from the audience, from one side of the stage to the other. Such a passage must have existed, diminishing the depth of the rear stage or enforcing a slight projection such as is illustrated in the Messalina picture. On the existence of this passage also depend the central doors from the rear stage, made so much of by some students. Concerning the balcony, the hut, the tiring-room, etc., very little is said, and many other subjects of interest—those discussed for example by Professor Graves and Mr. W. J. Lawrence—are rather strangely neglected.

On stage presentation Professor Thorndike shows significant advances. No longer do we find attempts to impose modern ideas of propriety and realism upon even the Scripture cycles, nor the Elizabethan stage represented as an unsatisfactory approximation to that of modern melodrama. Professor Thorndike represents it rather as a transition stage, half mediaeval, half modern, or indeed as more than half mediaeval, since he agrees that the

front stage was much more important than the rear, at least through Shakespeare's period. It is exactly this view which, despite the overwhelming evidence in its favor, has caused so much difference of opinion.

Concerning one important point I must comment a little more in detail. Professor Thorndike says that for the use on the front stage of simultaneous, and therefore to us incongruous, properties there is insufficient evidence. He offers no evidence against it, however, nor does he show that he has considered the evidence for it. So far to be sure only a little of this evidence has been presented, and here there is space only to hint at it. I cannot believe that he has sufficiently considered the practical difficulties of placing in the cramped quarters of the rear stage some of the settings which we know existed, nor the several contemporary allusions which at least hint at their position on the front stage. More than that, there are many plays which, if they used settings at all—and it would be absurd to imagine they did not—violate the principle of the continuous act repeatedly. Moreover, granted that the front stage was mediaeval in principle, why suppose simultaneous properties would have seemed out of place upon it? Professor Thorndike himself truly says that any feeling of incongruity from imaginary shifting of place depends largely on the assumption that the main stage is some particular spot. Precisely the same thing is true of simultaneous properties. Finally there is the principle of recurring settings, briefly suggested by me in *Modern Philology*, XII, 253. It is the only explanation yet suggested for an apparent and curious inconsistency in the use of the rear stage and the bringing out of properties on the front stage, which admits of any sort of proof. That the plays do so extraordinarily conform to it, provided the "trees" and the "throne" are allowed upon the front stage, is surely a matter not to be disregarded. No doubt the tendency was against the admission of large properties to the front stage, but the evidence seems to me at least to show that they were often present there through the life of Shakespeare. Professor Thorndike's view is attractive in its simplicity and moderation and will especially appeal to those who believe that in any disputed matter there is much to be said on both sides. In a question of fact, however, the ultimate opinion must rest upon the existing evidence.

Professor Thorndike says little concerning the technic of Shakespeare's plays as influenced by the conditions in which he worked, and fails to notice some important difficulties, I think, of Elizabethan stagecraft, but to balance this lack there is the positive merit of abstaining from theories for which the only basis is the imagination of the writer. The book is certainly the best presentation of the field as a whole which has yet appeared in any language, and it provides a valuable starting point for future work. Thus it is an admirable publication for this anniversary year, and Professor Thorndike is to be congratulated upon it.

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